

Drought Draws More Than Ranchers to Livestock Auction Barns

This year's drought and the resulting need of farmers and ranchers to sell livestock and replenish their fields with grasses for remaining livestock to graze has brought more than ranchers into the parking lots of sale barns across Northwest Arkansas. A van or truck with bags of illegal grass seed has been seen at several sale barns. The seed is in plain bags with no label and the owner is not licensed to sell seed in Arkansas. The salesman tells buyers the bags contain fescue seed or a mixture of fescue and other seed such as orchardgrass. Complaints from recent buyers and subsequent tests of this seed revealed as much as half of the contents of the bag was weed seed and inert material such as chaff and fungal bodies (ergot). The weed seed contained Dock and other noxious weeds at the rate of more than 2000 seed per pound. Planting 25 lbs per acre could result in over 50,000 dock plants per acre of field!



Picture shows example of illegal seed



Picture shows what Tall Fescue should look like

Inspectors for the Arkansas State Plant Board recently encountered some of this seed being sold and action was taken to stop the sale of this illegal seed. In fact, since the seed was in such serious violation of Arkansas' seed selling regulations, the remaining seed (over two tons in 50 lb bags) was confiscated. Arkansas' regulations on the sale of planting seed requires anyone who sells or advertises agricultural planting seed for sale in Arkansas to have a Seed Dealer's license issued from the State Plant Board and to label the seed according to these regulations. The label must include the percent pure seed, weed seed, other crop, non-seed matter (inert) and a list of the noxious weeds by name and number per pound. The percent germination must also be given and must have been tested within the previous 9 months. All bagged seed should have a label with this information and bulk seed should have the labeling information on or attached to the invoice. The labeler's name and address must also be on the label. For more information on labeling seed, see Circular 10: Regulations on the Sale of Seed in Arkansas <http://plantboard.arkansas.gov/Seed/Pages/LawsRegulations.aspx>

Contaminants found in this illegal seed included ergot fungal bodies. When a spore of a fungus (genus *Claviceps*) infects a flowering grass or cereal floret, an ergot kernel called a sclerotium develops. The sclerotium drops to the ground and remains dormant until favorable conditions allow it to develop fruiting bodies that eject spores infecting the flowering grass in the field. Ergot infection causes a reduced yield and reduces the quality of hay from the field. If livestock eat the infected grass or hay, it may cause a disease called ergotism.

Weed seed contaminants comprised over 31% of the contents of the bags of illegal seed. This alone makes the seed illegal for sale in Arkansas. The percent weed seed allowed in a lot of grass seed is 4 percent. Many of the weed seed are also considered noxious weeds, meaning they are particularly difficult weeds for various reasons. Dock, (*Rumex* sp) one of the most abundant weed seed contaminants in the confiscated seed is very difficult to control once

established in a field. One healthy dock plant can produce 40,000 seeds, which can remain dormant and still be viable for years.



Contaminants included (left to right): Sedge (*Cyperus sp.*), Ergot, Thistle, Dock, Sheep Sorrel, Cheat/Chess, and other weedy *Bromus sp.*

Even paying a low price for this seed is not a bargain. Only a little more than one third of the contents of the bag were actually fescue seed and some of the germination rates from complaint samples were as low as 40%. At that rate, you might get 15% of the seed to come up, if planted in favorable conditions. Plus, planting this contaminated seed will introduce many more problems for years to come.

Buying seed without a label and/or from un-licensed dealers leaves buyers with no recourse if the seed fails to perform. **Buyer Beware!** For information on seed dealers licensed to sell seed in Arkansas, call the Plant Board Seed Division at 501-225-1598 or visit the Plant Board Seed Division web page at <http://plantboard.arkansas.gov/Seed/Pages/default.aspx>